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ABSTRACT

The papers presented at this conference review current research on effective educational practices for low-achieving students and identify those that might be applied to programs funded under Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981. A function assumed by several conference participants was to act as reactor to papers written for a particular session. In this reaction to papers discussing success of delivery of Chapter 1 services, the thesis is developed that school districts should be allowed to use Chapter 1 funds to support programs designed to improve schools serving large numbers of children from poor families, without the necessity of designating specific children as disadvantaged. It is further argued that Chapter 1 should have the option of shifting from student targeting to school targeting. The following arguments are given for those theses: (1) in spite of heroic effort to target students, more non-poor, high-achieving students are receiving compensatory education than are poor, low-achieving students, and only 40 percent of the poor, low achievers are receiving Federally supported compensatory services; (2) schools serving large numbers of poor children are the most difficult schools in which to educate children; (3) student targeting prevents practices that are known to be effective, and encourages practices that are known to be ineffective or may have negative side effects; and (4) school targeting would allow educators to apply what has been learned about school improvement. (PS)

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SELECTING STUDENTS AND SERVICES: REACTIONS

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SELECTING STUDENTS AND SERVICES: REACTIONS

In these reactions to the papers by Kennedy, Jung, and Orland (1986), and Peterson (1986), I am admittedly developing a thesis of my own, and I might as well spell it out right up front. It is that school districts should be allowed to use Chapter 1 funds to support programs designed to improve schools serving large numbers of children from poor families, without the necessity of designating specific children as disadvantaged. If pressed, I might even argue that Chapter 1 should shift from student targeting to school targeting, but I'll settle for school targeting as an option.

The general argument runs as follows: (1) in spite of heroic efforts to target students, more non-poor, high-achieving students are receiving compensatory education than are poor, low-achieving students, and only 40 percent of the poor, low achievers are receiving Federally supported compensatory services; (2) schools serving large numbers of poor children are the most difficult schools in which to educate children; (3) student targeting prevents practices that are known to be effective, and encourages practices that are known to be ineffective or may have negative side effects; and (4) school targeting would allow educators to apply what has been learned about school improvement.

The Kennedy et al. paper focuses upon the relationship between poverty and achievement. In addition to being a very useful review of that domain, it provides some new analyses that take into account the length and intensity of the poverty experience. One point they make that is relevant to the school targeting argument is the "achievement scores of all students--not just poor students--decline as the proportion of poor students in a school increases" (p. II-10). Thus all students in a poverty-area school are at an educational disadvantage.

There is an important aspect of the poverty-achievement relationship that they did not deal with, and that has to do with why the relationship between poverty and achievement at the school level is much stronger than it is at the student level. In terms of correlation coefficients, the student level correlation runs about .30, while in some school districts the school level correlation can be as high as .90 between school achievement means and the percent of children in school that are above some poverty indicator.

The high correlation at the school level is due to something that statisticians call the grouping effect. This occurs when membership in the group (e.g. school) is related to either one or both of the variables being correlated. For

example, the socioeconomic homogeneity of neighborhood schools produces a relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and school, and that relationship produces the larger correlation between SES and achievement at the school level than is found at the student level. When school districts desegregate, for example, the school level relationship decreases because of the increase in socioeconomic heterogeneity within schools that usually results from that integration.

It is also important to understand the participation rates that national studies produce. I find Figure II-2 helpful in thinking about this problem. The broad ellipse in Figure II-2 outlines the distribution of students on two dimensions, socioeconomic status and achievement. Students to the left of the vertical dashed line represent those in the bottom quarter on SES, and those below the dashed line represent students in the bottom quarter on student achievement. Thus students in quadrant A represent low-achieving students from poor families.

As indicated above, this student level correlation is only about .30, so there are lots of poor students who are not low achievers (quadrant B), and lots of low-achieving students who are not from poor families (quadrant D). In fact, only about 10 percent of the student population is in quadrant A, and about 40 percent of those low SES, low-achieving students receive Chapter 1 services. This supports the claim that a majority of the most needy do not receive services. It is also true that 8 percent of the students in quadrant C do receive services, and 8 percent of that large population represents more students than the 40 percent of the students in quadrant A. This supports the claim that more non-poor, high-achieving students receive services than do poor, low-achieving students.

Who should be receiving Chapter 1 services has been a central argument throughout the history of Chapter 1. Some feel it should be the students in quadrants A and B (children from poor families), while others argue that it should be for low-achieving students (quadrants A and D). What happens in practice is that students come from the entire distribution of ability and SES. Targeting studies have focused upon how best to target students rather than on whether it makes more sense to target schools. That possibility needs to be given more consideration. In the initial Title I act, schools could use their Title I funds to support the general improvement of programs in a school: we need to understand why that practice was stopped.

I am not claiming that school targeting would serve more needy students, for it would serve about the same mix. I am arguing that disadvantaged students would be better served under school targeting because the kinds of programs that would

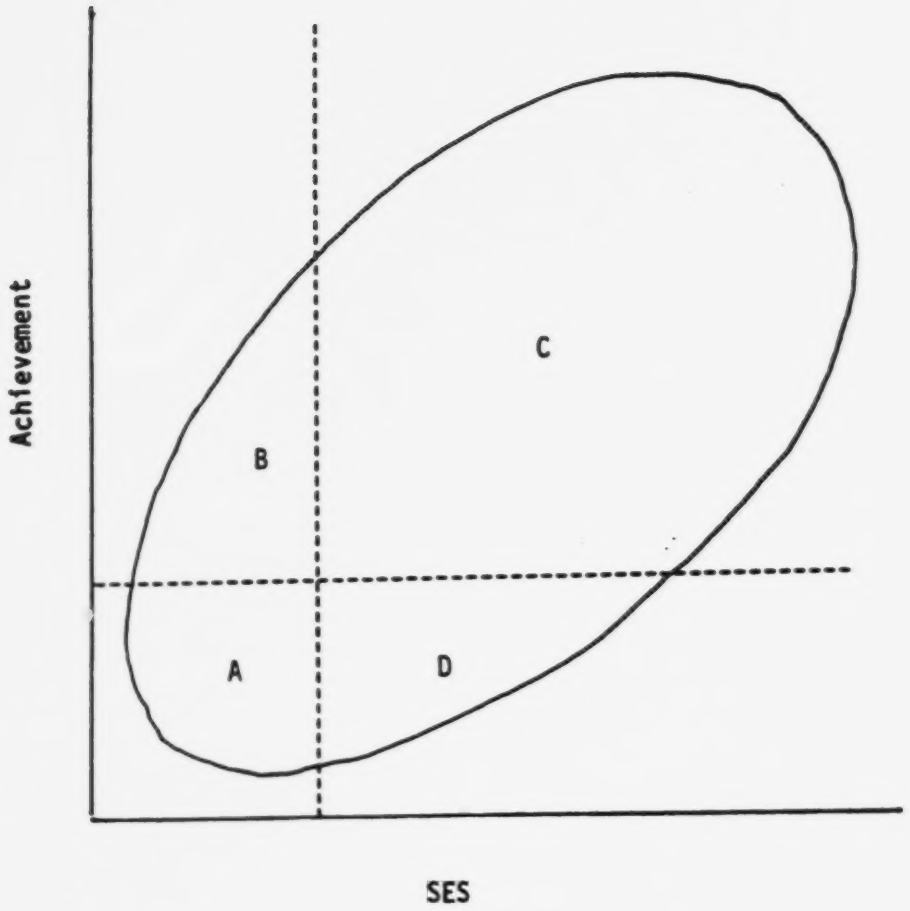

Figure II-2. Relationship Between Family SES and Student Achievement

be possible would be more educationally defensible. To address that issue, I want to turn next to the Peterson paper and look at what is known about effective instruction.

As Peterson points out, the dominant method of providing Chapter 1 services is to remove eligible students from the classroom for pullout instruction. As she points out, the evidence regarding the effectiveness of pullout programs ranges from negative to a statistically significant but educationally insignificant positive. No one seems to argue that such instruction has been shown to do the job compensating, that is, producing less educationally disadvantaged students.

Peterson then goes on to analyze what is known about effective instruction, and the implications of that knowledge for Chapter 1. She points out the importance of integrating instruction, and the tendency of pullout instruction to be fragmented. She also shows how pullout programs can affect the way children are grouped for instruction, and the disadvantages of homogeneous ability groups and the benefits of heterogeneous ability groups. For example, "small group cooperative learning interactions would be most productive in groups in which students differ in ability levels and expertise" (p. II-44).

A probable unintended negative side effect of student targeting is the result of labeling students as disadvantaged. The negative effects of labeling are well established. Peterson also helps us to see a probable mechanism for that negative effect based upon "the principle of compensation," in which less able students are given less demanding tasks, and as a consequence learn less.

One of the things that she did not go into is school level problems. Some of these are created by student targeting. These have to do with scheduling craziness that is introduced to make room for the Chapter 1 sessions (both in terms of time and space), the disruptions that are introduced by additional movement of students in and out of classrooms, and morale problems among teachers because of conflicts over such comings and goings. Other school level problems might be solved with additional resources, but student targeting precludes their use for general school improvement purposes. School boards tend to be unwilling to spend more money in some schools than in others unless those funds are for special, categorical programs. School level problems tend to be most severe in schools in high poverty areas.

A lot has happened since Federally supported compensatory education was introduced in 1965. A lot has been learned about learning, about effective schools, and about compensatory education. Title I and Chapter 1 have been the most heavily studied educational programs in history. It is very important

that the fundamental goals and assumptions of compensatory education be re-examined. This national assessment of Chapter 1 being conducted for Congress by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement provides a great opportunity for that re-examination. I certainly hope that the improvement of schools serving impoverished neighborhoods is a Chapter 1 option that emerges from this assessment.

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